

DIARRHEA

The body gets rid of waste through bowel movements. Every person has a pattern that is normal for him or her, whether the person moves his or her bowels once a day or every three days. The bowel movements should be soft, formed and it should not hurt or cause bleeding.

When waste products or stool move rapidly through the intestine it allows for less water absorption by the bowels. Therefore the stool is more liquid. Diarrhea involves frequent (more than two or three) bowel movements in a day.

Symptoms of diarrhea:

- Several bowel movements (more than two or three in a short time)
- Stools watery or even liquid
- Cramps in the belly
- Tenderness of the belly
- Increased gas
- Decreased appetite
- Stools may be an abnormal color, such as greenish
- Stools may have an unusually bad odor
- Irritation or burning of the rectal area

What can cause diarrhea?

- Taking in more fluids
- Some medications, such as laxatives, antacids, antibiotics
- Stress
- Infections
- Problems digesting certain foods, like lactose
- Eating more high-fiber food items, such as corn or beans
- There may be instances when an individual is severely constipated and liquid stool moves around the hard, formed stools giving the appearance of diarrhea or oozing.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Call 911 if the person appears:

- Gravely ill
- Gray in color
- Has large amounts of blood in their stools

In other situations:

- Consult your nurse or health care consultant
- If the individual is sick, call the health care provider
- Record the stool output – if frequent loose stools last longer than 24 hours, or the person has an elevated temperature or is becoming dehydrated, consult their health care provider
- Consult their routine orders for laxatives and consider holding that day
- Share your concerns with other care takers
- Write down what you see

